

SAUDI ARABIA | IN FOCUS

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF THE INFORMATION OFFICE OF
THE ROYAL EMBASSY OF SAUDI ARABIA IN WASHINGTON, DC



NOVEMBER 29, 2011

FOREIGN RELATIONS**GCC initiative to resolve Yemeni crisis signed in Riyadh**

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh signed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative to resolve the Yemeni crisis at the palace of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz in Riyadh on Nov. 23. Speaking afterwards, King Abdullah characterized the agreement as an "achievement that God has led you to accomplish in order to resort to reason and abandon discord, and remain united." During his remarks, GCC Secretary General Dr. Abdullatif Al-Zayani highlighted efforts exerted by King Abdullah to serve the Arab world. "Your directives and those of the GCC leaders stem from your eagerness to stop the bloodshed between the Yemeni brothers and to reach a peaceful solution to preserve Yemen's unity, security and stability," he said. Finally, President Saleh delivered a speech in which he thanked the Kingdom for hosting the meeting and welcomed the observation and assistance of Yemen's partners in order to implement the agreement.

GCC Foreign Ministers meet in Riyadh

The Foreign Ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states held their 121st meeting of the 32nd session of the GCC Supreme Council in Riyadh on Nov. 23. Speaking afterwards, Prince Saud stressed the importance of cooperation in the face of a rapidly changing world. He stated that the GCC Ministerial Council is taking the initiative to prevent further civil conflicts that could lead to more Arab bloodshed. Furthermore, he said, while GCC states have no expansionist aims or desire to interfere in the affairs of other states, they are prepared to defend themselves from terrorism and foreign plots.

When asked about efforts to end the Syrian crisis, Prince Saud said that an Arab initiative to deal with the conflict has been put forward for Syria to accept. While the Syrian government accepted it at first, it later attempted to alter the entire framework. Urging Syria to accept the Arab League plan, he warned that prolonged bloodshed could lead to the internationalization of the crisis.

Regarding the Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States, Prince Saud stressed that the threat was not only directed against the Kingdom, but also against international law and diplomatic relations. Noting that Iran has a history of breaching foreign embassies, he urged the international

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community to take concrete measures to prevent further incidents.

Arab Foreign Ministers approve sanctions against Syria

The Foreign Ministers Council of the Arab League decided during an extraordinary session in Cairo on Nov. 27 to impose economic and travel sanctions against the Syrian government in the face of continued violence against its civilians. The Foreign Ministers approved recommendations made during an extraordinary session of the Arab Social and Economic Council held in Cairo on Nov. 26. During that session, the participants discussed ways to utilize sanctions against government officials without harming the Syrian people.

The Foreign Ministers Council decided to immediately halt all transactions with the Syrian Central Bank and all financial and commercial transactions with the Syrian government, except those involving strategic commodities required by the population; to freeze the Syrian government's assets; and to prohibit Arab central banks from funding any governmental commercial exchanges undertaken by the Syrian Central Bank. Furthermore, the Council decided to freeze the assets of senior Syrian officials and ban them from traveling to Arab countries.

During its extraordinary session in Cairo on Nov. 24, the Arab Foreign Ministers Council called upon the Syrian government to sign a protocol document agreeing to an Arab monitoring mission. It also called upon the Syrian government and opposition to hold a national dialogue conference with the purpose of forming a national unity caretaker government.

ENERGY

Energy Dialogue Forum concluded in Riyadh

The Energy Dialogue Forum 2011, organized by the King Abdullah Center for Petroleum Studies and Research, concluded its activities in Riyadh on Nov. 22. The Forum focused on oil prices, solar energy in the Kingdom, market incentives and energy efficiency. Nearly 900 delegates representing producer and consumer-nations, global organizations and research groups attended the three-day gathering. In a speech, Minister of Finance Dr. Ibrahim Al-Assaf stressed the strength and durability of the Saudi economy. He asserted that Saudi Arabia plays a fundamental role in the global economy, pointing to its role stabilizing energy markets, its cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and its membership in the Group of Twenty (G-20). Furthermore, he expressed confidence that the Kingdom will continue to enjoy strong growth.

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SAUDI-U.S. RELATIONS

47,000 Saudi students on scholarship in the U.S.

The number of Saudi students on scholarship in the United States has reached nearly 47,000, says Assistant Saudi Cultural Attaché for Administrative and Financial Affairs in Washington, DC, Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Subayil. In a statement following an address at the 7th Forum for the Preparation of Students Nominees for Scholarships in Riyadh on Nov. 29, Dr. Al-Subayil noted that 30 percent of those students are female. Furthermore, the Saudi students have brought 23,000 companions along with them to the U.S. Pointing out the dramatic increase in the number of Saudi students in the U.S., Dr. Al-Subayil recalled that approximately 2,500 Saudi students were on scholarship in the U.S. in 2005. This year, he said, as many as 6,300 students will study at American universities within the framework of the 7th stage of the foreign scholarships program.

Second U.S.-Saudi Business Opportunities Forum begins in Atlanta

The 2nd U.S.-Saudi Business Opportunities Forum, organized by the International Trade Committee of the Council of Saudi Chambers and the U.S.-Saudi Arabian Business Council, in collaboration with the U.S. Commercial Service and the Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry, opened in Atlanta on Dec. 5. During the three-day forum, senior Saudi and U.S. officials and business leaders are exploring opportunities for increasing economic collaboration between their two countries. The event also provides an ideal environment for business networking. Minister of Education Prince Faisal bin Abdullah bin Mohammed is leading a delegation from the Saudi Ministry of Education to the Forum.

Sadara Chemical Company officially formed

Saudi Aramco and Dow Chemical Company announced on Nov. 28 the official formation of the Sadara Chemical Company, a joint venture between the two organizations. Sadara's production units are expected to begin running in the second half of 2015; all units will come on line in 2016. Within a few years of opening, the company is predicted to deliver annual revenues of approximately \$10 billion. Combining Dow's advanced technology and Saudi Aramco's project management and execution capabilities, Sadara will produce a wide range of products, including Polyurethanes, Propylene Glycol, Elastomers, Linear Low Density Polyethylene, Low Density Polyethylene, Glycol Ethers and Amines. Sadara will market the products domestically and in the Middle East, while Dow will sell on the company's behalf to the international market.

Ambassador hosts participants in human trafficking program

Saudi Ambassador to the United States Adel Al-Jubeir hosted a luncheon at the Embassy in Washington on Dec. 2 in honor of a Saudi delegation participating in a State Department-sponsored program on human trafficking. The event was attended by Saudi officials, particularly those involved in combating human trafficking, along with a number of Embassy staff members.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Saudi Arabia condemns storming of British Embassy in Tehran

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia deplores the storming of the British Embassy in Tehran, an act that is incompatible with the norms of human ethics and international laws, said a statement read in Riyadh on Nov. 30 by a spokesman of the Foreign Ministry. The statement noted that the Kingdom, whose diplomatic missions have suffered repeated attacks, affirms the inviolability of diplomatic missions and demands strict adherence to international agreements protecting diplomatic employees and their property.

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Forum on Uniting Arab Countries to Combat AIDS

Minister of Health Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeah opened the Saudi Forum on Uniting Arab Countries to Combat AIDS in Riyadh on November 28. Dr. Al-Rabeeah delivered a speech in which he highlighted Saudi efforts to prevent the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus. He noted that the Kingdom has been supporting regional and international efforts to prevent the prevalence of AIDS infections in Arab communities. Participants at the Forum discussed the latest scientific knowledge related to the nature of the disease, the various methods of treatment, the rate of new infections, and strategies for stemming the spread of AIDS. Furthermore, they examined ways in which to support AIDS patients by ensuring them proper health care services, providing them with social and psychological support and protecting their rights.

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SAUDI ARABIA-U.S. RELATIONS

King Abdullah receives telephone call from U.S. president

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz received a telephone call on Dec. 9 from President Barack Obama. During their conversation, the two leaders reviewed bilateral relations and discussed the latest regional and international developments.

Education Minister addresses Saudi-U.S. Business Opportunities Forum

Saudi Arabia has achieved remarkable economic and educational transformations over the past few decades, Minister of Education Prince Faisal bin Abdullah bin Mohammed told an audience in Atlanta, Ga. on Dec. 6. Addressing the Saudi-U.S. Business Opportunities Forum, Prince Faisal characterized the educational system in the Kingdom as a model for the Middle East and North Africa. He applauded the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Program for Foreign Scholarship, which has provided the opportunity for more than 130,000 students to study at the best universities in the world. Prince Faisal noted that the Kingdom is currently focused on building a knowledge-based economy.

General Electric, Saudi Electricity Co. sign \$300 million gas-turbines deal

The General Electric Company (GE) signed a \$300 million deal to provide natural-gas turbines for the Saudi Electricity Company (SEC) as part of a project to expand six power plants, GE announced on Dec. 5. Over the past five years, GE has supplied nearly 200 turbines to the SEC. According to the latest deal, the Saudi utility will purchase 13 new turbines, along with the related technical services. The turbines will be built at GE's factory in Greenville, S.C.

ECONOMY

Annual SAMA report reflects strength of Saudi economy

Governor of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) Dr. Mohammed Al-Jasser delivered the 47th annual SAMA report on economic conditions in the Kingdom to King Abdullah on Dec. 12. The report covers fiscal year 1431/1432 H. (2010), as well as the first quarter of the current year. Summarizing the findings, Dr. Al-Jasser reported that the Kingdom enjoyed its 11th consecutive year of growth, at a rate of 4.1 percent, with the non-oil economy growing at 4.9 percent and a budget

surplus of 5.2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Furthermore, the Kingdom saw its 12th consecutive surplus of balance of surplus, equaling \$66.74 billion. The inflation rate increased slightly from 5.1 percent in 2009 to 5.3 percent in 2010, falling to 5.2 percent in October 2011. Dr. Al-Jasser predicted that growth in the Kingdom will accelerate, largely due to unprecedented government spending on development projects. In terms of restructuring the economy and reforming regulations, Dr. Al-Jasser noted that Saudi Arabia was ranked 12 out of 183 countries in ease of doing business by the Business Performance Report, issued by the World Bank for 2012. He also praised the government's prudent oil policies, which have helped protect the Kingdom from the financial crisis and reduced the public debt from 104 percent of GDP in 1999 to approximately 7 percent in 2011.

ENVIRONMENT

Al-Naimi addresses Durban Climate Change talks

Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Ali Al-Naimi led the Saudi delegation to the Durban Climate Change conference in South Africa last week. Speaking on Dec. 8, Al-Naimi expressed hope that the forum will pave the way for closer global cooperation in the fight against climate change. He vowed that the Kingdom is ready to help the delegates reach a consensus on the issue, explaining that Saudi Arabia has made great strides in the field of environmental protection. He cited its endeavors to develop solar energy and other renewable energy sources, the establishment of the King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy (KACARE) and the King Abdullah City for Science and Technology (KACST), and the creation of clean fuel research centers.

FOREIGN AID

IDB and UNRWA sign accords to support education in Gaza

Representatives of the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank (IDB), in its role as Coordinator of the Program of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for the Reconstruction of Gaza, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) recently signed two agreements worth \$9.2 million. The projects involve supporting education and reconstructing 120 houses for Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip.

Sacrificial meat distributed among Palestinian refugees in Jordan

A representative from the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank (IDB), Tawfiq bin Mohammed Al-Ghamdi, handed over meat from 21,000 sacrificed animals to Jordanian officials in Amman on Dec. 12. Delivered as part of Saudi Arabia's "Project for the Utilization of Hajj Meat," the food will be distributed among charities and Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan.